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TAGS: PGOV KJUS KCRM EAID KDEM UNMIK KV

SUBJECT: KOSOVO: KOSOVO SPECIAL PROSECUTOR FILES GROUNDBREAKING INDICTMENT IN TRAFFICKING CASE

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On January 2, the U.S.-supported Kosovo Special Prosecutor's Office (KSPO) filed an indictment in the Peja District Court against three Kosovo Albanian men and three Moldovan women for human trafficking, facilitating prostitution, and money laundering. This groundbreaking indictment is the result of an eight-month investigation into human trafficking rings in Gjakova, and is the first ever in Kosovo to charge a client, to charge Moldovan women as recruiters, and to include money laundering in a human trafficking case. Prosecutor Raze Loshaj hopes to successfully prosecute the case so it can serve as a model for future human trafficking prosecutions. END SUMMARY.

KSPO files groundbreaking human trafficking indictment

¶2. (SBU) On January 2, the Kosovo Special Prosecutor's Office (KSPO) filed a groundbreaking indictment in the Peja District Court charging Kosovo Albanian male cousins Pal and Aleksander Pitaqi, the owners and operators of Club "AS" and Club West Park in Gjakova, with facilitating prostitution and organizing a human trafficking ring. The indictment also charges Moldovan females Veronica Dragan, Elena Pisaru and Tatiana Ciuvagu as recruiters and co-perpetrators for supporting the recruitment of new victims from Moldova. Dragan, Pisaru and Ciuvagu allegedly sent Moldovan victims employment contracts for work as dancers or waitresses, as well as money for their airline tickets to Kosovo. According to Loshaj, they also traveled to Moldova to receive money and contracts and escort victims back to Pristina. The indictment also charges Aleksander Pitaqi with money laundering and Dragan, Pislaru and Ciuvagu as co-perpetrators. Finally, it charges Uka Kolaj, a client of the Pitaqis, with facilitating prostitution. If found guilty, Aleksander Pitaqi could face up to 35 years in prison, Pal Pitaqi up to 25 years, Kolaj up to five years, and Dragan, Pislaru and Ciuvagu up to 26 years. Loshaj, who has received intensive training, monitoring and mentoring on these cases from the USOP Resident Legal Advisor (RLA) embedded in the KSPO, hopes to secure a conviction in this case and to use it as a model for future human trafficking prosecutions in Kosovo.

Undercover police operation frees victims and uncovers
trafficking ring

13. (C) The Pitaqi ring indictment would not have been possible without the investigative work of Kosovo Police Service Trafficking in Human Beings Section (THBS), whose undercover operation exposed their crimes using U.S. Government-donated surveillance equipment. Suspecting the Club West Park was employing trafficked women and forcing them to offer sexual services to its clients, KPS THBS obtained a court order to do a "simulated purchase," and two undercover policemen posed as clients at the club on the evening of April 7. According to the indictment, the officers spoke to Aleksander Pitaqi about sexual services that two Moldovan women, Olga Cutu and Ludmilla Calughin, would provide and then paid him 100 euro each for those services. Pal Pitaqi subsequently drove the women to the Hotel Metropol, where a hotel reservation had been made. When the women arrived, the hotel receptionist showed the two undercover officers to their respective rooms. The officers promptly identified themselves and arrested Cutu and Calughin, whom they later discovered were trafficking victims. (Note: The two women have since been voluntarily repatriated to Moldova. End Note.) According to the indictment, the Pitaqi cousins, Dragan, Pislaru and Ciuvagu recruited Cutu and Calughin as waitresses or dancers for a monthly salary of 150 euro, and then forced them to offer sexual services.

Money transfers and text messages bolster case

14. (C) Loshaj and KPS THBS investigators working on the

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Pitaqi ring case uncovered nearly 60,000 euro in money transfers from the Pitaqi cousins to co-conspirators in Moldova, mostly through Dragan, Pislaru and Ciuvagu. These money transfers not only helped them bolster their trafficking case, but also enabled them to add money laundering to the trafficking indictment and seek even stiffer penalties for the traffickers. This is the first time such a strategy has been tried in Kosovo.

15. (C) Loshaj and the KPS THBS investigators also discovered a trail of incriminating text messages about purchasing tickets for women in Moldova, which bolstered both the trafficking and money laundering charges. Some of the messages even contained instructions on how to transport the victims to Kosovo and how to deal with their travel-related concerns. Ludmilla Calughin's transport is one example. The investigators uncovered evidence that Ciuvagu received money from Aleksander Pitaqi through Dragan to transport Calughin from Ungheni, Moldova to Pristina on Malev Airlines. The investigators also obtained text messages from Dragan to Ciuvagu with information about a Western Union transfer of 1,200 euro to be used to purchase Calughin's tickets.
Client targeted for the first time

16. (C) Loshaj also included facilitating prostitution in the indictment. This would have been unremarkable if she had only gone after the Pitaqi cousins for operating clubs offering sexual services to paying clients, but she also indicted one of their clients, Uke Kolaj. Kolaj paid Aleksander Pitaqi 50 euro for the sexual services of a Moldovan woman named Elena Hrubi on April 7 and found himself caught up in the KPS THBS sting operation. Kolaj is the first client to ever be indicted in Kosovo. Kosovo law specifies that clients may only be charged if they willingly purchase the services of a trafficking victim. Since this is nearly impossible to prove, Kosovo prosecutors have never pursued them. Loshaj, however, cleverly charged Kolaj with knowingly assisting Aleksander Pitaqi with facilitating prostitution by purchasing Hrubi's sexual services, thus paving the way for prosecutors to make the same argument in future cases.

More indictments to follow

¶7. (C) Loshaj is now working on two other trafficking-related indictments, which are also the result of KSPO and KPS THBS investigations in Gjakova. The first indictment is of a trafficking ring led by Kosovo Albanian brothers Afrim and Skender Hoti, who run the Cabana Club. It also involves Pislaru and Ciuvagu. The Hoti brothers have sent many explicit text messages about the club's operations and recruitment of women in Moldova. They have also sent approximately 25,000 euro to Moldova by Western Union. The KSPO expects to obtain a search warrant and conduct arrests within a month.

¶8. (C) The second indictment focuses on a group run by Lulzim Thaqi and his uncle, Sadik Thaqi, and is connected to Gjakova's Club Makuba. The Thaqi ring loans money and women to other traffickers in the region, and may benefit from the collusion of a Western Union employee. Photo surveillance that will support the indictment shows Sadik Thaqi picking up women at a hotel in the morning and then locking them in an apartment above the club, while some of the group's text messages contain explicit information about the club's operations, as well as the ring's recruitment and transportation of women, bribery of border police and sexual initiation of new recruits. According to Loshaj (protect), Lulzim and Sadik Thaqi have personally sent approximately 125,000 euro to Moldova for the purposes of recruiting and transporting victims from Moldova, while women working for the group have sent approximately 40,000 euro. Loshaj hopes that Thaqi's loans and support to other trafficking groups will generate new investigations. As with the Hoti ring investigation, the KSPO expects a search warrant and arrests within a month.

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¶9. (C) COMMENT: The groundbreaking Pitaqi indictment demonstrates that the KSPO's capacity is improving and that the USG investment in it is reaping benefits in Kosovo's fight against human trafficking. It paves the way for future, more comprehensive, indictments such as the two Loshaj is currently preparing. If successful, the Pitaqi indictment will also send a powerful message to clients that they are no longer safe from prosecution, thus chipping away at demand. USOP will continue to monitor developments in the Pitaqi case and to support KSPO's trafficking in persons prosecution efforts. END COMMENT.

KAIDANOW